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Contact: Leslie Craig, NOAA
(727) 551-5786

NOAA05-R921
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 18, 2005

NOAA GRANTS \$45,000 TO RESTORE FISHERY HABITAT IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

Grant Awarded to Wildlife Research Team, Inc.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration awarded \$45,000 to Wildlife Research Team, Inc. for a community-based project to restore fishery habitat in Matheson Hammock Park on Biscayne Bay, Miami-Dade County, Fla. The project is funded by the Community-based Restoration Program within the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service Restoration Center.

The grant funds a project to clear dead trees and debris deposited by Hurricane Andrew in 1992 from mangrove tidal passageways. Once tidal flow is restored, the mangrove forest will serve again as a vital nursery and foraging ground for young fish and invertebrates. In an effort to prevent further damage to this sensitive habitat, the debris will be removed by volunteers using canoes and manual labor instead of large machinery. To date, volunteers have cleared in excess of 20,000 linear feet of tidal corridors. It is estimated that the current project will enhance an additional 200 acres of mangrove habitat.

"Mangroves provide a number of important ecological services in the southeast United States. From a fisheries perspective, mangroves provide nursery and foraging habitat, essential for healthy populations of many important species", said Roy Crabtree, regional administrator for the NOAA Fisheries Service Southeast Region. "NOAA Fisheries Service has a commitment to protect and restore this critical resource."

For five years, the Community-based Restoration Program has supported the Wildlife Research Team's efforts to organize volunteers for weekend restoration of Matheson Hammock Park. To date, more than 150 volunteers have participated in this project, contributing more than 7,000 hours of volunteer time.

"The wonderful thing about this project is that volunteers can look back at their work and truly say what we did today matters," said Tom Kazo, executive director, Wildlife Research Team. "It is not difficult for volunteers to develop a willingness to commit to the project because they realize that just a small amount of time saves a treasure load of life."

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The NOAA Restoration Center Community-based Restoration Program (CRP) is a financial and technical assistance program that promotes strong partnerships at the national, regional, and local level to restore fisheries habitat. NOAA CRP works with organizations and government to support locally driven habitat restoration projects in marine, estuarine, and riparian areas. NOAA CRP funds on-the-ground habitat restoration projects that offer educational and social benefits for citizens and their communities, and provide long-term ecological benefits for fishery resources. Since 1996, more than 900 projects in 26 states have been implemented using NOAA funding and leveraged funding from national and regional habitat restoration partners.

Each year, NOAA awards approximately \$900 million in grants to members of the academic, scientific and business communities to assist the agency in fulfilling its mission to study the Earth's natural systems in order to predict environmental change, manage ocean resources, protect life and property, and provide decision makers with reliable scientific information. NOAA goals and programs reflect a commitment to these basic responsibilities of science and service to the nation for the past 35 years.

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

Community-based Restoration Program: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration>